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## A GUIDE TO THE MOHAVE DESERT

DAVID G. THOMPSON. **Routes to Desert Watering Places in the Mohave Desert Region, California.** vii, 4, and 87–269 pp.; maps, ills., index. *U. S. Geol. Survey Water-Supply Paper 490-B.* Washington, D. C., 1921.

A widely-read periodical recently stated in an editoral note that "The Great American Desert" is no longer on the map and that tourists in automobiles now safely cross districts where pioneers years ago lost their lives struggling in the sands. Both statements are in a measure true; but the great desert is still there, and travelers sometimes find a trip across it dangerous in spite of the comparative ease of automobile travel. Competent testimony on both these points is found in an important paper, lately issued by the U. S. Geological Survey. The preface by O. E. Meinzer, a widely experienced observer, states:—"The desert region of the United States forms a great triangle whose base, 800 miles long, is the Mexican border from the Peninsular Mountains, in southern California, to the mouth of Pecos River, in Texas, and whose apex is in north-central Oregon. . . . It covers about 500,000 square miles or very nearly one-sixth of the area of the United States. This region is by no means devoid of natural resources or human activity. It contains prosperous cities, fertile agricultural districts, forest-clad mountains, a large aggregate number of watering places, many rich mines, and an unknown wealth of mineral deposits. But the localities that have water supplies are widely separated oases in a vast expanse of silent, changeless, unproductive desert whose most impressive feature is its great distances and whose chief evidences of human occupation are the long, long roads that lead from one watering place to another. In the future existing oases will be enlarged, many new ones will be created, and the mineral and agricultural product of the region will be greatly increased. But in spite of all that man can do this large region will remain essentially a desert."

As to the disappearance of the name "Great American Desert" from our maps, that is natural enough; such a name is unpopular because it is unattractive to settlers; no western territory or state would relish being represented in a region so called. Even the word "oasis," although truthfully and courageously used by Meinzer as quoted above, is commonly replaced by "settlement," which carries with it no suggestion of a barren desert around it. But in the interest of candor and accuracy, the plain facts deserve frank statement. The most important among them are, on the one hand, the vast extent of the desert region and, on the other the great value of its oases and mineral deposits. The text of the above-named paper by David G. Thompson, although chiefly devoted to accounts of roads and watering places in the Mohave desert district to which it is limited, contains also general and useful information by which popular misapprehensions may be corrected. The Mohave district, including Death Valley, was selected for description because its 60,000 square miles in southeastern California and southwestern Arizona include "the driest, hottest, and least explored part of the desert region." Its three type forms, isolated mountains, piedmont alluvial slopes, and basin-center *playas*, are briefly characterized; many mountain ranges and more than fifty *playas*, large and small, are shown on the accompanying maps. The erroneous idea that a desert is completely devoid of plant and animal life is corrected; an observant traveler may see a considerable variety of both. Mineral products have been large; from 1894 to 1918 San Bernardino county, or that part of the Mohave desert which occupies southeastern California, yielded $56,000,000, largely in gold and silver; but these products are inconstant; they rise and fall rapidly; and the mining towns, being dependant entirely on more fertile districts for their supplies, are as a rule short-lived: thus Calico, which is said to have had a population of 5,000 in the late eighties, has had only three or four inhabitants in recent years. It is otherwise with the irrigable areas; for, although they are not of great extent in this driest and hottest part of the vast desert region, they are likely to prove permanent assets to the nation.

Valuable information is given under "Suggestions for Desert Travel." It is remarked that "until recent years the traveler in the desert used burros or horses and wagons as his means of transportation. Since the advent of the automobile the use of horses has nearly ceased. With this change travel in the desert has become less difficult and has therefore increased very much. . . It must not be supposed, however, that travel in the desert with an automobile means travel without danger. In some respects the danger has increased. It is much easier to get a long distance from known watering places with an automobile than with a team, and a breakdown at a remote point may be very serious. Since automobiles have come into use there is also much more travel by persons not familiar with the region through which they are going. Moreover, with automobiles numerous difficulties may arise that were not encountered by those traveling with horses and wagons. . . . No one should go in an automobile far from a town who is not sufficiently familiar with the mechanism of the machine to make necessary adjustment of the carburetor and spark plugs and other minor repairs or who cannot make repairs to tires. This seemingly needless statement is made because there are many persons who know only how to manipulate the throttle and brakes of their cars. The writer has come upon such persons stalled on main roads of the desert, and they would have been in a bad plight on less traveled roads."

Inasmuch as "such persons" appear to exist in large numbers, and as the desert actually exists in large area, there seems to be about as much danger when they attempt to cross it as there was in the early years of pioneer travel.

W. M. Davis

### Health as a Factor in Human History

R. M. Binder. **Health and Social Progress.** xi and 295 pp.; index. Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York, 1920. 7½ x 5 inches.

One of the hopeful signs of the future is the growing recognition that man is biologically an animal. Books like Professor Binder's "Health and Social Progress" are helping the world to see this because they emphasize the intimate relations among three great factors, first the biological inheritance with which a man is endowed; second the physical health and energy with which he uses his endowments; and third, the external conditions such as education, religion, and government which determine the direction of his energies and the degree of wisdom with which they are used. Professor Binder stresses health, which is today perhaps the most neglected of these three factors. The thesis of his interesting book is that "No people has ever succeeded in rising above the level of savages unless it possessed at least fair health; where either economic or climatic conditions prevented health, no civilization could arise; and where it had arisen it was doomed whenever new conditions arose which undermined health." His description of the perfect poise and vigor of the man whose health is so good that he absolutely forgets his body is fine. So, too, is his discussion of many indirect ways in which even a slight departure from perfect health leads to discontent, poor work, poor temper, bad judgment, and general inefficiency.

Even more interesting is the author's summary of what has actually been accomplished by measures for the eradication of hookworm disease, pellagra, and other ailments. It is an extraordinarily significant fact that "about 940,000,000 out of the 1,600,000,000 people on the globe live in countries where hookworm disease is prevalent," and that in many of these countries the percentage of infection ranges anywhere from twenty to ninety per cent. When this is put with such facts as the following it shows that we are here face to face with one of the greatest of all the means of progress during the next century. "In Costa Rica sixty-six laborers before being treated for hookworm disease normally cultivated 563 acres of coffee monthly. After being treated for hookworm disease they cultivated 750 acres, resulting in a net monthly increase in wages of 27 per cent, after allowing for a 15 per cent reduction in unit pay. Moreover, in India, Clayton Lane reports that the amount of work increased 20 per cent on one estate and 50 per cent on another, and on both was of better quality than before the laborers were treated; while reports from British Guiana indicate that the efficiency of the laborers employed by one company increased from 25 to 50 per cent after hookworm measures were put into operation." Moreover, as Binder shows repeatedly, the deadening effect of poor health on man's capacity and happiness is a prime factor not only in backward regions, but even in our own country among people of high intelligence.

It is to be regretted that a book which contains so much that is good is marred by minor inaccuracies and overstatements and by an unusually strong tendency toward broad generalization with little or no visible basis of fact. For example, Sweden is stated to have the lowest death rate and longest life of all countries, although the *Annuaire International de Statistique* gives the death rates per thousand inhabitants for 1908–1913 as follows: Denmark 13.2, Norway 13.6, Netherlands 13.9, and Sweden 14.0; while England and Wales stands at 14.1, and New Zealand and Australia stand much below 14.0. Again olive oil and silk are given a prominent place among the "tropical" imports into the United States. Worse than these minor errors is the fact that in his enthusiasm for his subject the author minimizes the importance of everything else. For instance, he attributes ill health almost uni-